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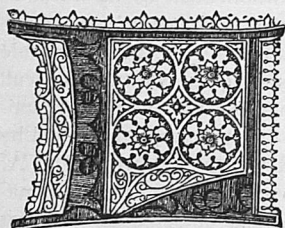
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ART NEEDLEWORK

DECORATIVE LACE-WORK.



LACE made on the pillow is not needlework, and its beauties are not of the same order; but point-lace, properly so called, made with points or stitches, comes into the category of art needlework, from its beautiful and expressive designs so marvellously adapted to the materials and conditions of its workmanship, and from its matchless execution. For everything but personal use, and for some church purposes, these triumphs of needlework are too costly and elaborate; but there are several kinds of lace, or rather linen-work, which, as being more adapted for general purposes and for their decorative value, deserve a place with colored embroidery. We cannot give here directions for doing these kinds of work, but merely mention the different styles which seem best suited for decoration, and give a few hints as to the rules of art to be applied to them.

We begin with the bolder kind of tape-guipure, which is made of linen tape twisted and folded into a pattern, held together with bars, and then filled in and enriched with needlework. For this work the pattern should be such as may be formed by the flat folds of the tape, cut and joined on again when required. No attempt should be made to conceal that it is a tape by drawing it into shapes that it will not easily take, or by making it imitate lace made entirely with the needle or upon the pillow. The best material for this work is a real tape—that is, one in which the threads cross each other at right angles, and not a braid which has no warp, the threads in which are plaited together. The bars or "brides" should be firm, not too thin, and sufficient in number to hold the tape well in its place, allowing no loose curves or ill-secured angles. It is better to have too many than too few bars, and, whether with or without knots, they should be of firm overcast or button-hole work, not merely of twisted threads. The thread used for the bars and for filling some of the spaces should neither be too fine nor too tightly twisted, in which case it is wiry and intractable. Even if the soft thread should seem to make the work fluffy and confused at first, the first wash will clear it more than enough. This guipure work, and the other kinds of linen work of which we are going to speak, however complete, should be easy—not a monument of patient industry, into which as much work as possible is put, nor a sampler of various stitches and curious devices, but a clear and facile carrying out of the original idea, easy to be comprehended, and producing a good effect at a moderate distance.

A beautiful kind of work, which is founded upon old lace, though we believe the manner of executing it to be quite modern, is done by drawing patterns on linen, overcasting or buttonholing the outlines, cutting away the ground, and enriching the pattern with bars, cords, and raised work. This kind of work admits of great richness both of form and execution; the beautiful flowing patterns of Venetian, rose, raised, or bone point can be very well reproduced in it, preserving their beauties of form and proportion. It will be understood that these laces must not be merely imitated, but carefully studied and adapted to the intended purpose. The patterns for this reproduction must be considerably enlarged and their detail much simplified, giving only their broader characteristics. If this be neglected, the linen will be only a coarse and unsatisfactory imitation of the close-set stitches of the original, instead of an arrangement of pleasant contrasts between the plainness and evenness of the linen, the spaces and bars of the ground, and the raised work of the edges. The outlining of this work with gold thread has a very rich and beautiful effect, which is increased if the lining be of amber or golden-brown silk or satin.

"Point-conté," lately called "guipure d'art," or, in homely phrase, darned netting, is another effective kind of white needlework. It is almost the only kind of old work which, in modern practice, has preserved some degree of beauty, in spite of the fancy-work shops and ladies' magazines. This may be ascribed to the unyielding nature of the netted groundwork, which compels a certain special treatment, and thus vigorous and beautiful designs have been produced, but through blind rather than intelligent obedience. In the desire for variety rather than for appropriateness, later designs have been spoiled by cutting away portions of the net in order to produce larger open spaces, destroying the unity of the diaper-like ground and making uncomfortable-looking holes. The ground should be netted with linen thread, beginning at one corner; great care is needed to make it true and even, so that it will stretch properly in the little frames used for the work. The pattern should be worked in the same thread as that used for the ground. This is a very old kind of work; the early specimens are simply darned on the netting, without any raised work, in bold conventional designs, sometimes with letters, armorial bearings, and such devices.

"Punto a gruppo," "point-tiré," or drawn work, is a kind of linen work that is particularly good for decorative purposes; it is simple and easy, and produces an excellent effect. It is most appropriate for the ends of table-cloths, toilet-cloths, tidies, or towels, the last being its original Italian use. As the names indicate, it is made in the material of the cloth itself, some of the threads of which are drawn out and the remainder grouped into patterns more or less elaborate. A hem-stitch like that used for pocket handkerchiefs is useful for this work; it may be worked singly along a row of drawn threads, or, for a broader line, on both sides of the row, either taking up the same threads as those taken on the other side, so making little bars; or taking half the threads from each of two of the opposite stitches, and so making a zigzag. Other patterns may be made by passing a thick linen thread along the centre of a row of threads from which the weft has been drawn, and either twisting them over each other or knotting them into groups.

Pretty work may be made by embroidering the spaces of plain linen between the rows of drawn work, either with silk or with ingrain cotton, red or blue; only one color should be used; the cotton should be the thickest that can be procured, and a little of it or of the silk should be mixed with the fringe. The patterns worked should be very simple, either line patterns, dots, stars, or very simple leaf patterns. Our own taste is in favor of using only one kind of work, rather than a mixture of drawn work and embroidery; but the latter is so much admired that we give these few hints for it, with the advice that in mixed work one or the other kind should be made the more prominent. If the prominence is intended to be given to the embroidery, the drawn work should be distinctly subservient; but if the contrary, the embroidery should be confined to narrow patterns of the simplest kind. This work washes extremely well, and so does the cotton or silk embroidery; it should not be starched or ironed, but pinned or basted flat and tight while wet upon a board or the floor, and left to dry.

Drawn work should be finished with a fringe of the warp of the material knotted or twisted into tassels. The elaboration of this knotted fringe gave rise to what is now known as Macramé lace, a kind of work that has often a very good effect. The old specimens are very beautiful; but the modern revival is not always happy, partly because the thread used is too smooth and tightly twisted, making the work too regular and machine-like; partly because the patterns are too elaborate, and the threads are too much tied, instead of being left partly loose and showing their real nature; and the easy, natural look, which is the great charm of the work, is thus lost. By avoiding these faults, and remembering the character of the work as a finish and fringe rather

than a lace, very good edges and borders may be made.

Perhaps the most beautiful work and the best art production of all these laces is "point-coupé," or cut work, erroneously called Greek lace. It is made on a foundation of linen, of which some of the threads are cut away and the remainder worked over, making regular square spaces. A severe ground plan, as it may be called, is thus laid down, and the pattern, however rich and varied, is subdued and confined by guiding lines, and may be made to form stars, circles, crosses, or cobwebs of a geometrical character. As the limits imposed by the manner of working cannot be passed, this work is never seen in a bad style, even when the severe right angles of the foundation are partly overcome, and the scallops and vandykes that were once only the edge of the straight border are enlarged and developed until they form the principal part of the work; the geometric character is preserved, and the work, which by its first conditions restrains while it exercises the fancy and skill of the worker, is still beautiful and excellent.

Cut work is very durable, and old examples of it are numerous; it was a great favorite with the painters of the 17th century, and is found in every portrait, forming the turned-up cuffs of the Vandyke dress, and edging the falling collars that displaced the standing ruffs of the previous half-century. The finer kinds of this work are very laborious, though labor is seldom better spent; for furniture decoration it can hardly be too coarse, provided the material be sufficiently durable to repay the trouble of the working. Brown packing cloth for the foundation—which is entirely covered—worked with brown thread, in a suitable pattern, with not more detail than the thick threads can express clearly, will make a beautiful border. This may be edged with a Macramé fringe of the same thread as is used for the work, care being taken that the knotted pattern be quite simple and unobtrusive, so as not to divide attention with the border, to which it is only an adjunct.

For the borders at the ends of a white linen altar-cloth, this lace should be worked on stout white linen with a thick soft white linen thread; this admits of a very rich pattern, and is admirably suited to the purpose. The lace should be firmly finished off with a flat hem of the foundation linen all round, making it complete in itself. A fringe of linen thread should be sewn on, so that it can be renewed. The cloth, of finer linen, should have a broad open hem all round; if crosses are added, they should be worked in thick embroidery with fine linen thread. Then the cloth should be washed twice over, and got up without starch. Last of all, the cut-work borders should be sewed to the ends of the cloth with an open stitch, which may be easily cut when the cloth is washed, which it will require much more frequently than the borders.

The materials for each kind of work here mentioned are the same—linen cloth and linen thread of various degrees of whiteness and fineness, the choice and matching of which require considerable skill and judgment, only to be gained by experience.

ART needlework has become the fashion, and has superseded in one form or another almost all other fancy work; but it is much to be hoped that this fact will not prove its ruin in the long run. It was not as a new kind of fancy work that it was established. It must not be forgotten that embroidery is one of the most ancient of the decorative arts, and that its revival at the present time is only a part of the general revival of true art.

A NEW idea is to take out the plain wood panel in front of the tall standing Dutch clocks, and to insert in its place one of embroidered silk, worked in some artistic and elaborate way.